

RURAL NURSING

BY L. L. DOCK

NOT long ago, in the mountain region of Pennsylvania, I had an interesting glimpse of the mutual aid of country people in time of illness. The patient was an old man of eighty-three, quite a character, and well-known and respected in all the country round. His wife and grandchildren took the brunt of nursing (as they understood it) and all the housework, and every night, for nearly two weeks, the men of the community took turns in "sitting up." They seemed to arrange it among themselves, as one of the incidental obligations of neighborliness, and the family, to my belief, had no anxiety on the subject. Every night a different one appeared, until the round had been made, and then it began again, so long as the necessity lasted. The men were wood-cutters, mountain rangers, etc., and did their day's work as usual, coming on duty about nine o'clock.

Of course nursing in the skilled sense was quite non-existent; yet when the patient wanted anything or when anything needed to be done there was some one there to do it, and the results were really very good. These big fellows lifted and assisted the patient very gently and efficiently, restrained him when he was delirious, and gave medicines with a fair amount of regularity. Their presence gave a decided sense of security to the isolated family, and when they came in in the late evening they brought a certain fresh energy with them.

Alas, that in a mountain region of the purest and most delicious air there should be the same old fixed prejudice against open windows. All tight shut, some even nailed—such is the night habit of country dwellers. I would much like to know what the weird bogie is that inhabits the night air, but from the settled convictions of the people it might be something immoral. The boast of virtuous pride in times of sickness, "I never took off my clothes for two weeks," is often literally true in the country. It was true of the old grandmother. She would have considered it a heinous offense, quite incompatible with decent feeling, to have undressed and gone to bed while the old gentleman was ill.

But what a total, primitive ignorance of the true nature of illness! By day, all of the sympathetic visitors crowded into the little sick-room and sat close around the old man's bed. To have done otherwise would have been hard-hearted and unsympathetic. And, in fact, the patient liked it, and grumbled when the doctor forbade it because it made him worse. Then, when he was wildly delirious,

jumping out of bed and dashing the medicine to the floor, the old wife was shocked and puzzled at his unwonted behavior. "Ain't that too bad! I never did see father behave like that before!" and as soon as consciousness returned the old gentleman was remonstrated with for his obstreperous conduct.

Nature does many wonderful things, and after a comatose night, stertorous breathing, and pounding pulse; after a later night of delirium, Cheyne-Stokes respiration, picking at the bed-clothes, and various other such manifestations, she got this old gentleman of eighty-three finally happily out of bed, and sent him driving across the mountains.

NURSING IN OLD MEXICO

By OLIVE PURVES

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THE work and social standing of the graduate nurse are as yet but imperfectly apprehended by the public in old Mexico, and for this reason it is still an easy matter for the untrained and ignorant woman to find employment in caring for the sick. It is, at the same time, a good deal of a struggle for the educated nurse to obtain the professional and social recognition accorded her in her own country.

There are at the present time twenty-four graduate nurses doing private duty in the City of Mexico, three of whom are men.

Existing conditions in regard to the care of the sick are the inevitable result of the fact that for generations this responsible duty was relegated to women of the "Sairey Gamp" type—women of no education and of questionable habits and perhaps more questionable morals. Progress is being made, however, in the education of the public in this matter, though there are yet many families who will employ an unskilled woman and pay her the same price as that asked by a trained nurse—five dollars gold per day. The following incident will demonstrate how low are the standards.

The wife of one of the leading medical men of the city became interested in the widow of a plumber, and, wishing to aid the bereaved woman, suggested to her husband the propriety of giving the widow some nursing to do. The doctor in question consequently recommended his wife's protégée to a brother physician, who placed the woman in charge of an operative case. The day following the operation the patient questioned the nurse concerning her temperature, and was frightened nearly into fits when informed that it was 40 C.